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ABSTRACT

This paper argues for the inclusion of content analysis in communication research designs and for the utility of this methodology in the examination of communication events. The first half of the paper describes four types of communication content that can be analyzed: unintentional messages, such as the verbal imagery used; unconscious speech, such as stuttering and vocalized pauses; and body language. The potential each of these content types has for constructing mass communication theories is discussed. The second half of the paper reports on five content analyses concerning the 1960 and 1976 presidential debates in order to illustrate the kind of research that can be conducted on two of the four content types identified. These five content analyses covered the major issues discussed, media coverage of the debates, relationship between public issues and the issues debated, imagery used by the candidates in debate, and individual differences in fluency. In conclusion, the paper discusses the implications of content analyses for the study of interpersonal communication as well as for mass communication research. (CC)

Content Analysis of Presidential Debates As Communication Events

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Content analysis in several ways resembles campaign promises. Both are talked about, their value to the relevant system is rarely debated, and, in the end, they fall short of the hopes they foster. On one hand, campaign promises often fail to materialize because they are ill-considered, are only partially thought through, or because politicians underestimate difficulties or opposition in implementation. On the other hand, content analysis has failed to live up to its potential in mass communication research possibly because research designs overestimate the utility of content data simply quantified and isolated from social, political, and message context. Except in a few cases, multi-method research designs rarely feature content analysis. Neither is content analysis used to validate research assumptions and hypotheses. In this paper, we argue for the inclusion of content analysis in communication research designs, and for the utility of this methodology in analysis of communication events. It is assumed that the reader has a working familiarity with the logic of content analysis and basic knowledge of its research techniques. [c.f. Holsti, (1969a, 1969b); Gerbner et al, (1973).] For our purposes, Holsti's definition of content analysis is accepted: "Content analysis is any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages" (Holsti, 1969a: 14). As we shall see, other definitions of content analysis such as Berelson's (1952) insistence on the coding of "manifest content" and Cartwright's (1953: 424) equating of content analysis with coding open-ended survey respons are conceptually incomplete or otherwise inappropriate for analysis of several types of communication events.

We have selected Holsti's definition because of the latitude it offers the researcher in characterizing messages. Berelson, for example, makes at least one assumption about messages that we feel constrains the general applicability of content analysis. He argues that it is the study of manifest content that is meaningful and conversely, that non-manifest content is not meaningful, and cannot be measured systematically and objectively. With this we take exception, for there is a great amount of content in any communication event that is not manifest in the sense that Berelson means (simply, directly understood), yet reflects important concerns of communication scholars. Moreover, these aspects of communication we feel are inseparable from communication events except at substantial costs in lost knowledge. The non-manifest is fully available for audiences to see and hear. And most importantly, audiences do give it meaning. Therefore, content analytic research designs should include strategies to measure non-manifest as well as manifest content.

Inquiries going beyond manifest content must recognize an essential multi-dimensionality in communication events. Later in this paper, we shall provide a model representing this multi-dimensionality and suggest means for operationalization.

The Research Setting

In the past few years, content analysis has been employed in agenda-setting research. Used in conjunction with audience surveys, content data have been instrumental in suggesting the power of mass communications--possibly to provide frameworks for thought, if not thought itself. Typically

(e.g., McCombs and Shaw, 1972; McLeod, Becker and Byrnes, 1974; Benton and Frazier, 1976), these studies record issues presented in newspapers and newsmagazines, and on television, along with respondents' perceived or individual issue saliences. On comparing rankings of issues presented by mass media with respondents' ranking of important issues, substantial correlation often is found. For example, in studying the 1976 presidential debates, Becker et al. (1977) compare public agendas to debate issues determined by content analysis. Patterson and McClure (1976) study television's role in the 1972 presidential election, using content analysis to assess individuals' political knowledge.

In the midst of controversy about direct media effects, limited effects, or no effects, research such as the preceding has proven useful. By relating content data to individuals' patterns of responses, the studies define and locate meaningful connections between mass media and individuals. However, it must be noted that these studies are most concerned with a single aspect of content (issues) and thus with only one potential source of effects. Neglected are effects attributable to richer aspects of communication content including verbal incoherency, imagery and kinesics. New strategies of research are needed to determine which aspect of a communication event bears (or shares) responsibility for observed effects.

Aspects of Communication Content

Communication researchers in the past were quick to forge new methodological and data manipulation tools, though they might have honed

those already in the workshop. Partly in reaction to methodological overkill and, partly as an outgrowth of frustration with limits on theoretical questions open to exploration through traditional content analysis, we began to consider empirically neglected dimensions of content in communication events. In particular, we felt that in the study of political communication, four types of communication content can well be analyzed, depending on research purpose. First, and most typically, content includes conscious communications, manipulable by the speaker and involving a well-developed intention to communicate. An example is comprised of literal or manifest content of speeches and documents or those messages actively intended by speakers or authors. Confronted by an accurate text or transcript of the communication event message originators must agree that it represents what they said.

Second, some content entails unintentional message transmission or "double meaning." With the purpose of strengthening messages, by reference to unchanging objects or naturally occurring phenomena, message originators often employ imagery, analogy, and symbolism. For example, if a speaker said, "The dam broke; I was in a sea of controversy," the meaning is not literal and the message is not substantive. Another way words are used meaningfully but not substantively involves the assignation of physical properties to abstractions. For example: "Reaction was swift and strong." In both cases, the words have meaning beyond the manifest. Confronted with text or transcript, message originators would say meaning was implied.

A third type of content data reside in the unconscious use of speech within the context of substantive messages. This is reflected in stuttering, incoherency, and the use of vocalized pauses such as um; er,

and uh. Message originators usually have no intention of emitting this type of content. Indeed they try actively to avoid it, perhaps for the very reason that such unintentional utterances carry so much meaning. There is very little argument about the meaning of "um"'s, though originators would insist they mean nothing at all.

Fourth, some content occurs spontaneously and without sound or "substance," as in body language. For example, there is no verbal translation of a smile and except in defined social circumstances, the smile represents an unconscious physical response. Nevertheless, a smile is without doubt a message with meaning for observers. Similarly, psychological states may be revealed through voice print patterns and galvanic skin response.

If we consider political communication as a function of two major variables: (1) message substance and (2) message selection, and if we build in greater and lesser degrees of consciousness bearing on message selection, our four types of communication content can be summarized as in Figure 1.

Data collected from each content type represented in the quadrants of Figure 1 would have potential for theory construction. For manifest content (#1), already political communication researchers have explored the relationship between issue content in new and political advertising and voter behavior (Patterson and McClure, 1976).

Use of metaphors and imagery (#2) can be documented to assess the degree of truth in stereotypes describing candidates. If a candidate really "lacks substance," this should be revealed in analysis of

extemporaneous speech. At another level (Mebane, 1977) the same type of data yields insight into culture, particularly when data are collected over time. Content analysis of mass media coverage of political campaigns, for instance, may reveal tendencies to report campaigns as if they were wars or sporting events. For insight into culture, we may test hypotheses that war imagery is used more frequently in campaigns occurring while the U.S. is at war. Or, we may find an increase in sports metaphors and imagery [(the campaign as a horse race (cf. Carter, 1977)] with growth of leisure time and increased professionalism in sports. Finally, by analyzing candidates' speeches, we can measure the extent to which candidates adopt (or create) prevailing imagery and metaphor and the degree to which images become contagious during campaigns.

Data representing the third quadrant of Figure 1 can be used to test hypotheses concerning politicans' images. In recent elections, with the growth of televised campaigning, a "presidential" appearance--i.e., confident, self-assured, articulate, fluent--has been emphasized. Type 3 content measures of candidates' behavior together with survey research could be used to construct indices of qualities and rhetorical skills accounting for candidates' images. Furthermore, it could provide a yardstick to measure media performance by allowing comparison between media reports of candidate fluency and actual fluency.

Kinesic analysis (#4) can contribute to theory by creating opportunities for multi-method validation of research hypotheses. There is a large body of literature to support the existence of non-verbal indicators of psychological stress. In conjunction with measures of verbal stress (#3), dictionaries of candidates' body language could be constructed and tested.

But in spite of obvious utilities for this variety of content data, political communications typically are analyzed only as manifest content. To use the terms of our classification scheme, candidates' statements on issues are recorded and reported as important, substantive messages inspired by candidates' thoughtful issue consideration. Meantime, the accompanying imagery, although inspired by the same conscious message selection process, rarely attracts attention. Presumably, imagery carries less meaning because it is abstract. But just the opposite is arguable--that imagery conveys more meaning than manifest content, by virtue of greater generality. Verbal incoherency, similarly, is not well researched, because it is presumed to be unintentional, and therefore meaningless. But incoherency, particularly in conjunction with analysis of issues or politicians, seems quite informative. It may indicate uncertainty about policies as important to know as candidates' issue stands per se. Physiological responses and body language also are ignored. Yet it seems as useful to look for a cool brow as for issue position; this is part and parcel of a candidate's bearing or image upon which the success of policy initiatives may rest.

The Presidential Debates as Communication Events

In our own research, we find the fourfold classification scheme of Figure 1 to be quite useful. Our specific empirical focus centers on televised presidential debates as communication events, but the classification scheme, we feel, applies equally well to any mass mediated event with verbal and visual messages. Indeed, our conceptual framework could be applied to interpersonal and mass mediated communication events alike.

Independent researchers have collected data described by each quadrant in Figure 1. But rarely have scholars analyzed the same communication event at more than one level, as we propose to do now.

In the analysis of presidential debates, each type of content (Figure 1) can be operationalized in any of several ways. Conscious communication (#1) can be analyzed by systematic analysis of the debate transcripts. Research questions focusing on the manifest content of the debates, the issues raised, the political figures mentioned, the economic and political actors discussed, all can be quantified simply once the content categories related to research hypotheses have been established. Reliability of these items is certain to be high.

Unconscious, non-manipulable choice content (#2) can be analyzed in the debates. One can consider, for theoretical reasons, differences between candidates in the relative use of past versus present or future tense verbs to be partially indicative of progressive or conservative orientations. Or, one can, assuming a sound theoretical orientation, compare the use of first person singular (I) versus first person plural (we) in explaining political programs, and thereby have an indicator of collective versus individual orientations toward the presidency. Candidates can be compared with one another, or a single candidate can be compared across issues with respect to use of metaphors and imagery. A candidate with a progressive orientation may use phrases drawn from travel ("moving ahead," "road to prosperity," and so forth), while another candidate may use religious imagery ("new spirit," "faith in government"). With prepared transcripts, analysis of images is accomplished without insurmountable problems after a coding scheme is devised.

Content data may also be mined from the unconscious realm producing vocalized pauses and incoherencies instead of or mixed with

intended messages (#3). Psycholinguists have long pointed out that increases in vocalized pauses serve as physiological indicators of stress. At the same time incoherency may signify incompetence or uncertainty. By using transcripts that include all the ums, uhs, false starts, stutters and other indicators, individual candidates' utterances can be compared usefully within and across issues.

Unconscious, non-manipulable messages (#4) can be measured, though with more difficulty than verbal messages, as indicators of stress, competence, or image. To be sure, candidates cannot be given, at least in post-hoc analysis, electro-cardiograms or GSR tests, but voice prints can be taken from audio tapes, and video tapes can provide data on kinesic activity.

Uses for data derived from the four types of context found in debates are abundant. Researchers, for instance, can employ these data in media performance studies, as debates are major events widely reported in both print and electronic news media. It has often been argued that mass media report only a limited quantity of available information. Through a content analysis of news media--a traditional analysis of manifest content--the extent to which the debates are reported, the issues that are emphasized, the attention given to substance versus style can be quantified easily. In conjunction with content analysis of the debates, the extent to which media reports deviate from the actual debates in terms of issues emphasized and other dimensions then can be measured. Further, with complete transcripts (or videotapes for kinesic analysis), objective indicators of "subjective" variables--such as the extent to which a candidate exhibits nervousness--can be compared with media accounts. A candidate

may be described in media accounts as having spoken hesitantly compared with another candidate, or having made "numerous" verbal errors. Content data can be used to test the accuracy of such statements.

A second research program using content data is one establishing a basis for judging the extent to which candidates address issues of public concern. For example, if we assume accuracy in public opinion polls in which voters report the issues most important to them in choosing a candidate, we have a hierarchical ordering of salient issues. If we can assume further that candidates try to address those issues of concern to the electorate, analysis of the debate content would permit measurement of the extent to which this goal is met. In conjunction with media performance studies, the questions posed in debates themselves reveal the extent to which media correspondents perceive issues to be important, and reflect the distance of media correspondents' perceptions of issues from the public's.

Thus, beyond describing the issues raised and difference between candidates in terms of unconscious communication described earlier, content analysis of communication events (such as televised debates) can form the bases for comprehensive mass communication research designs. As Chaffee (1975) suggests, content analysis in complex research strategies can lead to the development of integrated data sets for systematic analysis of the relationships among society's members (through public opinion data), authorities (debate analysis), and mass media.

Method

For three of the four categories in Figure 1 we have developed illustrative examples of how content-analytic techniques may be applied to presidential debates as communication events. As noted earlier we have as yet taken no physiological measures for the low substance, unconscious message selection quadrant (#4).

Prior to content analysis of the first 1976 presidential debate, it was necessary to create a complete transcript including all utterances, in order to provide needed data on non-substantive, unconscious aspects of communication events. This was prepared by the authors from studio-quality videotapes, annotating the New York Times' "verbatim" transcript of the debate (which excluded vocalized pauses and errors of fluency and included several errors and omissions). The first 1960 debate transcript used was prepared by Clevenger et al. (1962), from professional-quality audio tapes and a newspaper transcription.

The chosen unit of analysis was the "issue," determined by coder-pair according to a standing definition: topics raised by candidates or questioners relating to substantive areas of controversy or conflict within the social or political system.

Multiple issues could be housed within individual speaker turns; within issue-units up to ten subissues (specific substantive concerns) and discrete issues (specific policy recommendations) also were coded.

Thirteen domestic issues formed the basis for issue classification roughly parallel to cabinet functions (e.g., commerce, defense).

Also, two "non-issue" categories were used, to cover debate formalities and pleasantries.

Within issue units, debate content was recorded besides subissues and discrete issues (e.g., references to political officials, ethnic and nationality groups, economic actors, dates and times, political symbols, metaphoric language). Also, the number of words, non words, and repeated words or phrases per issue was noted.

To compare issues raised in the debates to public agendas and mass media coverage of the debates, a second data "collection" phase involved computing the "most important national problem" named in open-ended questioning of respondents to Gallup Polls #635 and 636, conducted shortly before and after the first 1960 debate.

A third research phase was classic (manifest) content analysis of all debate-related articles in the first editions of Time, Newsweek, and the New York Times after the first 1960 and 1976 debates. The articles were analyzed by a single coder using the same classification system to identify issues as in debate coding. Additionally, articles were classified by topic.

Reliability tests conducted up to six months after original coding of the presidential debates showed content data used in the following analyses to be satisfactorily reliable. Using Holsti's (1969a) percentage of agreement formula, average reliability was found to be 92 percent.

Findings

Table 1 presents analysis of questions and statements by the moderator and questioners as well as the responses given by the candidates. The

greater number of words and issues in the Carter-Ford debate, of course, reflects the fact that this debate was ninety minutes long (not including the 27 minute gap of silence during the audio transmission breakdown) compared with sixty minutes in 1960.

Substantive questions that can be addressed from manifest content analysis are presented in Tables 1 through 4. They are the products of a Berelson-type content analysis of the debates and of print media reports and even of a Cartwright-style "content analysis" of survey responses (performed by the Gallup Poll).

As in other manifest content analysis Table 1 invites historical comparison in this case of the major issues presented in the first 1960 presidential debate vs. its 1976 parallel. Most striking is a close comparability in terms of the percentages of words devoted to discussion of government and economics in 1960 and 1976. In both cases, slightly more than half of all major issues related to government, and over one-fourth dealt with economics. These of course are broad areas housing political questions of lasting interest. But at the same time, Table 1 suggests the rise and fall of issues likely to be quickly addressed. In 1960, defense and foreign affairs, and education were issues, quite likely as a function of cold war competition and hostilities. These were not concerns in 1976, but discussion of natural resources in the wake of the energy crises and looming shortages occurred with some frequency.

Also notable in Table 1 is the simultaneous continuity and change in the issues between 1960 and 1976. Governmental concerns (e.g., action of government leaders; candidates' qualifications for office; partisanship; size and scope of federal government; preservation of the

American system) remained constant as the main focus of questions and candidate responses over the two time periods. Similarly, discussions of domestic economic issues ranked second highest in frequency in both years. These discussions concentrated on government spending, balancing the budget, tax reform, economic growth, employment, inflation, and similar issues. Together, discussions of the two major issues covered about four-fifths of each debate.

Economics and government were not, however, the only issues of the debates, although they were central. Other issues emerged in each election campaign and surfaced in debate. And, between 1960 and 1976, several issues previously mentioned disappeared from the candidates' and questioners' personal agendas. Among these are the issues that give each election its unique character, and provide independent or issue oriented voters with an opportunity to choose candidates on a basis other than their position on the traditional party divisions buried in broad government and economic issues.

In 1960, defense and foreign affairs occupied eight per cent of the discussion, yet in 1976, this was not addressed as major concerns. Repeatedly in the 1960 debate, the participants underscored the relationship between domestic policy and foreign policy, hinting that domestic success in the cold war battle versus the Russians and Chinese depended on a well executed foreign policy and a strong defense posture.

Other issues gain or diminish in urgency portent over time. In 1976, issues emerged that had been largely irrelevant to the 1960 agenda. To some extent, the absence of discussion on resources (i.e., conservation and energy) reflects limited foresight by the 1960 candidates. Indeed,

in 1960 the emphasis on economic growth at all costs to avoid being outdistanced by the Soviet Union (by 1970!) encouraged unplanned resource use. By 1976, the energy crisis was a reality, and earned a healthy share of debate time.

Finally, health (e.g., government assistance for health; training of professionals; delivery of services), education (e.g., aid to education; quality of schools; busing), and social welfare (e.g., quality of life programs; civil rights and liberties) disappeared as distinct issues between 1960 and 1976. This is not to argue, of course, that these issues have been resolved or are no longer appropriate for presidential debates. However, in view of the slight increases in domestic government and economic issue discussions between 1960 and 1976, it may be the case that health, education, and welfare nowadays are discussed in terms of their costs in a deficit laden budget (economics) or in terms of the limits to government's provision of social service (government).

Overall, then, content analysis of the debate texts permits us to explore the evolution of issues over time. The analysis, while substantively interesting, results from the most traditional use of content analysis.

Media Coverage of the Debates

With the debate content (manifest) known, the question of print media reporting of the debates can be addressed through a second manifest content analysis. In this way, media fidelity to debate substance and a host of agenda-setting questions can be tested.

Following each debate, several reports appeared in the New York Times and in Time and Newsweek. However, much of the reporting was devoted to aspects of the debates other than issues, as shown in Table 2. Several of the articles on the debates dealt only with voter reaction, technical aspects of the production, and so forth. But even in the lead stories, relatively little attention, with one exception, was devoted to substantive issues found in the debates. (Interestingly, in support of our introductory remarks, journalists doing their own "content analysis" of the debates tended to ignore the manifest content, and to address that we termed earlier as non-manifest content.)

From these reports, a reader might consider the debates to be without substance. Most of the articles were devoted to who won and who lost, interviews with viewers, the physical appearance of the candidates. In 1960, only the New York Times had substantial coverage of the issues. The New York Times also contained a transcript of the debates.

Coverage of the 1976 debates was considerably more issue oriented across the three sources, and contained far more words. Nevertheless, substantial portions of the reports were devoted to physical appearance, performance by the candidates, studio conditions, and winners and losers. Again, issue coverage in the New York Times was considerably more substantial than in the weeklies despite the fact that the weeklies had more time. In 1976, the Times had a complete transcript, and Newsweek had a partial transcript of about half the text.

It is clear from these data that even the most prestigious news sources presented just a selected portion of the debates. For these elite sources, a substantial portion of coverage is devoted to the debate equivalent

of campaign hoopla--the studio conditions, testimony, and so forth.

Public Opinion and the Debate

A third question concerning the presidential debates addressed by manifest content analysis is whether they made a difference to voters. In other words, did they provide issue oriented voters information with which to make an informed voting choice?

Citizen's assessment of the "most important problem" facing the nation before and after the 1960 debate is quite constant, with few exceptions (Table 3). Relations with the Soviet Union, Castro, China, and Communism in general often were named as problems by the sample after the debate. No one can say whether this is attributable to the discussion of foreign affairs and defense in the debates, or to actual events then occurring at the United Nations. However, the election itself became more important following the debates, and recognition of domestic economic problems also increased. While the data in evidence are not overpowering, they suggest a limited, consistent relationship between issues raised in the debates and the public's issue agenda.

Relationships between issues identified by the public as important and issues discussed in the first 1960 debate possibly are not apparent because the most important issues of 1960 already were established as foreign affairs and defense issues. In 1976, there is a much stronger after-the-fact relationship between public issues and debated issues (Table 4). Public concern was for economic issues such as inflation and unemployment

("very" or "somewhat" important to about three-fourths of the respondents). But other concerns such as crime (third most important), are only briefly mentioned in the debate. From Table 4, it can be seen that the 1976 debate participants did address many of the same issues of interest to the public, although to a lesser extent than the public interest might warrant.

Imagery

In our classification scheme, we argue that the use of metaphor and imagery affords a speaker with opportunity for ambiguity, or a chance to avoid substantive issue discussion. Images, we feel, are largely controlled by the speaker, and represent a conscious use of vocabulary. But image choice is only within a limited range of acceptable dimensions, as Table 5 indicates. The candidates are remarkably similar in their use of imagery.

Candidates in 1960 used considerably more imagery (recalling that the debate lasted only 60 minutes) than the 1976 candidates. For each debate there appears to be image contagion. In 1960, both candidates used transportation and travel as the most frequent image (e.g., "we are moving in the direction of freedom;" "these programs are simply retreads;" "Uncle Sam steps in") while in 1976, body references were most frequent (e.g., " this touches human beings;" "hands of the taxpayer"). Besides travel and body references, Kennedy used several images of weights or burdens (e.g., "obligation upon our generation;" "heap the burdens on the property tax") and Nixon referred to sports (e.g., "kickoff press conference;" "the price line has been held;" "when you are in a race").

In 1976, Carter favored references to machines (e.g., "tapping our people;" "breakdown in leadership"), while Ford preferred references to building and shelter (e.g., "build America;" "working on the economy"). The popularly conceived notions of candidate stereotypes were not revealed by this analysis of imagery, it is interesting to note. Ford, the former football player, had relatively few references to sports, while Carter had few reference to religion.

Candidate Fluency

With so much media attention devoted to candidate style rather than to substance of debates, an objective measure of some aspects of style is useful. Candidates are referred to in media accounts as hesitant or nervous yet evidence for these statements is non-objective. Content analytic techniques allow us to systematize and objectify such analysis.

As in Table 6, nonfluency data extracted from the debates reflects candidates' individual differences in fluency. In terms of vocalized pauses (i.e., non-words such as um, er, uh, and so forth) and sequentially repeated words, the 1960 debaters reveal remarkable fluency. Common perceptions of the 1960 debaters as more skilled orators clearly have some validity from these data. If errors of fluency are indicators of stress, neither candidate in 1960 appeared stressed. This tendency is particularly enlightening in view of the general assessment of Nixon losing the debate because he was so visibly nervous (perspiring, tired looking) combined with radio researchers' finding that he sounded confident and cool. Moreover, it is very suggestive of the potential for visual analysis and physiological measures for televised presidential debate analysis suggested by quadrant 4 of

Figure 1.

In 1976, the debaters were far less fluent. Carter, for example, repeated words over ten times as often as Ford, and he had over twice as many non-words, offering evidence consistent with media reports that he was nervous. Although baseline data need to be analyzed to compare his non-fluency rate in other spontaneous oral presentations, there is evidence even in this debate that he was nervous during early issue discussions (84 occurrences in the first 5 issue sequences) but calmed down toward the conclusion (22 in the last 5 sequences).

Discussion

As a methodological technique, content analysis can make contributions to the study of commuication besides providing researchers with knowledge of the manifest content of political communication events. For example, when used with survey data, content data are instrumental in establishing the relationship between mass media's issue emphases and the public's agenda. Content analysis of media's manifest issue coverage also can be compared directly with the public's perception of important issues in public policy-type research.

But aside from issue analysis, other types and levels of content data are amenable to investigation. By consideration of two dimensions underlying content, our fourfold classification scheme illuminated three aspects of communication content seldom researched but as worthy of study as "manifest" content. Two of these three aspects of content were measured and reported here, by way of illustrating 1) the ease with which seemingly

subtle aspects of communication events can be measured and 2) the bearing such aspects of content have on communication research.

For example, our analysis of candidates' use of imagery--beyond its contribution to understanding the presidential debates as events in themselves--has implications for the study of interpersonal communication, insofar as it reflects image contagion in the dialogue between candidates. Each debate features its own most prevalent imagery. At the same time, each candidate frequently used his own distinctive form of imagery. Overall, the imagery might be seen as reflective of the times; alternatively, it could be that one candidate started the dominant image and the other used it defensively.

Our analysis of candidates' various nonfluencies was an example of unconscious message selection complicated by desire to communicate a substantive message. Here too, mass communication research may be informed. The content data supported some of the popular and mass media descriptions concerning debate performance, which implies that at least some aspects of content are accurately perceived and identified. In contrast, our analysis of news reports about the debates showed little correspondence between the topics actually discussed and the issues reported. This is rather interesting--to think that communication research has been most concerned with aspects of content not readily perceivable even to reporters, who are presumably trained observers of communication events. Meanwhile, what is best and accurately remembered--the nervousness of 1976 and the skill of 1960--goes uninvestigated.

Our research has not yet addressed itself to the fourth type of content data specified by our classification scheme (Figure 1). But it

is likely that analysis of unconsciously selected nonsubstantive messages would yield helpful information. One use would be to confirm or deny conceptions of the effects of "body language." In the case of Nixon, popular wisdom has it that his stubble, perspiration, and tired look cost him dearly. From our findings on candidate fluency, Nixon's speech was not found to contribute to a poor showing; this suggests that the objectionable content lies in the unconscious, nonsubstantive realm. Whether the untoward behavior had any real meaning for voters of course is an empirical question for which measures remain to be developed.

Finally, reviewing our findings with regard to issues, or manifest content of the debates, there is a reaffirmation of the utility of content analysis in communication research. As in some agenda-setting research, a connection was established between the issues in the debates and public agendas after the debates. This in other words suggests the power of mass communication (and political communication) as an independent variable with implications for government and society as a whole. At the same time, our analysis of media coverage of the debates is rather alarming, when viewed in terms of agenda-setting. What does it mean for the public's agendas to be set on the basis of journalists' misperceptions of a communication event?

In conclusion, the exploratory nature of this paper must be reiterated. But to the extent that considerable potential use for content data is illustrated even by a few simple measures, their utility for communication research ought not be overlooked.

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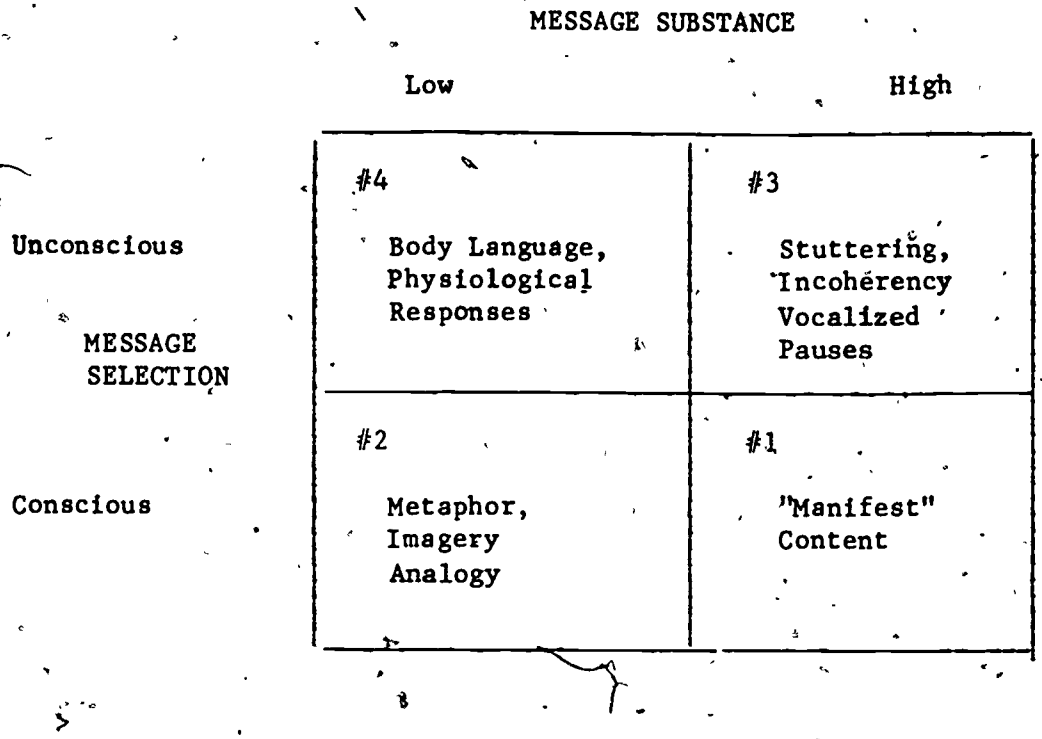

Figure 1. Classification Scheme for Content Analysis of Communication Events

TABLE 1

MAJOR ISSUES IN THE DEBATES

	1960			1976		
	n	words	%	n	words	%
Domestic Issues						
Government	20	5702	53	39	7500	54
Health	1	147	1			
Education	5	582	5			
Welfare	1	99	1			
Economics	12	2757	26	25	4292	31
Foreign Affairs, Defense	6	932	8			
Resources				5	1210	9
Law				1	143	1
Procedure						
Debate Formalities	34	476	4	28	617	4
Participant Pass	1	4				
Total	80	10,699	98%	98	13,762	99%

TABLE 2

DEBATE NEWS COVERAGE

Topics	1960 Newsweek %	1960 Time %	1960 NY Times %	1976 Newsweek %	1976 Time %	1976 NY Times %
Preparation				14		
Purpose				1	2	
Election News		14		19	11	1
Style	35	32	10	8	12	12
Studio	23		13	9	8	4
Rules	24	10	6	2		1
Testimony	5	45	5	12	28	4
Issues	14		53	36	39	78
Total	101%	101%	99%	101%	100%	100%
n (words)	863	473	1338	4178	3192	2635
Issues						
Economics			61	70	47	56
Government			18	27	49	44
Welfare			21			
Education					4	
Resources				3		
Total			100%	100%	100%	100%
n (words)			693	2908	1178	2066

TABLE 3

PUBLIC'S* ASSESSMENT OF MOST IMPORTANT NATIONAL PROBLEM

	10/6/60 Pre-Debate		10/29/60 Post-Debate	
	n	%	n	%
Balanced budget	5	0	14	0
Foreign aid	31	1	22	1
Defense costs			5	0
Threat of war (general)	567	20	694	19
Threat of war with Russia	111	4	274	8
Relations with Russia	390	13	649	18
Better understanding between nations	562	19	667	19
Communism	236	8	405	11
Red China	3	0	21	1
Unemployment	165	6	174	5
Space	23	1	6	0
Military preparedness	115	4	108	3
Narcotics, drugs			1	0
Labor unions	37	1	41	1
Inflation, wages, prices	134	5	221	6
Taxes (generally)	23	1	87	2
Farm prices	56	2	74	2
Racial problems	198	7	156	4
Juvenile delinquency	38	1	27	1
Education	30	1	43	1
Honesty in government	10	0	8	0
Social Security	33	1	42	1
Presidential election	47	2	89	3
Domestic economic problems	38	1	99	3
Loss of American prestige	30	1	18	1
U-2 incident	18	1	1	0
Failure of summit conference	1	0	2	0
Japan	2	0	2	0
Castro, Cuba	69	2	155	4
Overpopulation	5	0	6	0
Need more faith in God	30	1	46	1
No answer, missing	303	10	323	9

*Gallup Opinion Polls #635 and 636

TABLE 4

ISSUES MOST IMPORTANT TO VOTING BEHAVIOR*
September 24-27, 1976
(Post Debate)

	Most Important (5) %	(4) %	(3) %	(2) %	Least Important (1) %	No Opinion %
Inflation	68	11	6	3	6	6
Government spending	57	17	10	4	5	7
Unemployment	56	18	10	4	6	6
Crime	56	15	13	4	6	6
Tax reform	54	15	14	4	5	8
Energy situation	46	16	17	7	6	8
Lack of trust in government	43	15	17	8	9	8
Welfare	42	17	20	6	9	6
National health care	40	19	17	9	8	7
Defense spending	38	22	18	8	6	8
Gun control	35	11	17	8	21	8
U.S. relations with Russia	32	18	22	9	8	11
Middle-East situation	32	15	25	10	7	11
Conservation/environment	31	19	22	9	8	11
Size of federal government	31	17	22	9	11	10
Busing	28	10	18	15	21	8
Amnesty	26	10	19	13	23	9
Women's rights	25	12	21	11	22	9
Abortion	25	11	19	12	23	10
Nixon pardon	22	10	11	12	35	10

*Gallup Poll: "Would you indicate how important each issue is to you in determining how you will vote by mentioning a number between one and five?"

TABLE 5

CANDIDATES' IMAGERY

	1960				1976			
	Kennedy		Nixon		Carter		Ford	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Sports	9	4	31	14	12	7	7	5
Weather	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sex, Love	2	1	4	2	5	3	7	5
Food, Eating	6	3	2	1	4	2	7	5
War, Violence	19	9	22	10	9	5	5	4
Health, Energy	10	5	7	3	13	7	2	2
Body Parts, Functions	36	18	47	21	31	17	35	28
Weights, Measures	35	17	22	10	23	13	20	16
Destiny	2	1	0	0	4	2	1	1
Travel	39	19	53	24	29	16	14	11
Elements	3	1	0	0	1	1	1	1
Religion	0	0	2	1	4	2	2	2
Machines, Nonhumans	17	8	12	5	28	16	12	9
Construction, Shelter	26	13	20	9	15	8	14	11
Total	205	99%	222	99%	178	99%	127	100%

TABLE 6

CANDIDATES' NONFLUENCIES: NONWORDS AND REPETITION

Issue Sequence	1960 Kennedy Nonwords	Kennedy Repeats	Nixon Nonwords	Nixon Repeats	1976 Carter Nonwords	Carter Repeats	Ford Nonwords	Ford Repeats
1	0	0	0	0	35	7	4	0
2	1	0	0	0	11	4	9	0
3	3	1	0	0	16	7	2	0
4	2	0	4	5	11	6	6	2
5	6	2	0	0	11	5	5	0
6	1	0	2	1	0	0	4	0
7	4	0	0	0	2	0	3	0
8	8	0	7	1	12	7	10	1
9	4	1	4	0	10	14	5	0
10	3	0	5	2	12	12	11	0
11	2	0	4	1	15	5	4	0
12	1	0	0	0	16	5	2	1
13	2	1	3	0	1	2	10	1
14	5	0	3	1	15	3	4	1
15	0	0	4	0	18	4	9	1
16	1	0	0	0	9	4	1	0
17	0	0	0	0	23	10	5	1
18	0	0	2	1	8	1	9	0
19	2	0	0	0	15	2	3	0
20			1	0	1	1	5	0
21					12	2	8	0
22					5	2	10	0
23					2	1	1	0
24					2	0		
Total	45	5	39	12	262	104	121	8
% Total words	1.0%	.1%	.8%	.3%	4.3%	1.7%	2.4%	.2%
x	2.4	.3	2.0	.6	10.9	4.3	5.3	.3
sdv	2.3	.6	2.2	1.1	8.0	3.7	3.3	.6